A

LETTER,

FROM

Mr. EDMUNDS, PETERBOROUGH,

TO

JOHN CHAMBERS, Esq; ORTON,

ON THE

NORTH LEVEL BUSINESS.

PETERBOROUGH;

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BRITISH MUSEUM

TO

JOHN CHAMBERS, Eſq;

ORTON.

Dear Sir,

YOU will probably be ſurpriſed at a Letter from me upon a Subject which of all others you may think me leſs acquainted with, but when you recollect I expect your Anſwer, from which I ſhall receive ſufficient Inſtructions to guide my future Proceedings and render me equal to withſtand any Attempt that might be uſed to impoſe either upon my Property or my Underſtanding, you will give me Credit for my Intentions; tho' it is poſſible a Man's Property might bear Impoſition, his Underſtanding ſhould ſuffer none, for the Moment the deſiging Man is maſter of your Underſtanding you have no Will of your own, and you ſubject yourſelf to every Danger; I ſhall therefore awake early, for it appears to me that *Impoſition* never ſleeps, conſequently I cannot be too much guarded or too early in my Inquiries; I will admit that you abound in Wiſdom but that you lack Activity, the one I wiſh to follow, the other I will carefully avoid.

Having peruſed the late Publications on the Subject of the North Level I am juſtified in addreſſing this Letter to you, as I know you are competent to all Information; I am likewiſe convinced you have Candour enough to ſuffer a young Proprietor not only to deliver his Opinion, but in ſome Degree to arraign your Conduct, I mean upon the ſcore of Inactivity, in both Points I may be wrong — We will Sir with Permiſion candidly conſider the ſeveral Publications, as well on the Part of Mr. Maxwell as of Mr. Wing; We will alſo intirely depart from all haſty Expreſſions which might have happened on either ſide; We will from this Time conclude no illiberal Hints to have dropt — and attend ſolely to the Subſtance, for it is from the *Subſtance*, we as Proprietors are to expect Benefit; And I am in the fulleſt Expectation of receiving every Relief that is reaſonable to be wiſhed — But to be competent to judge how far we are relieved, or how deeply oppreſſed will require your Aid: In my own inferior Judgement I am ſure we muſt keep ourſelves independent — We muſt remember that we are Gentlemen, and Proprietors ſubject to Payments properly impoſed; And above ſubmiting to any Payments created by dictatorial Authority, uſurped from Confidence; For you will recollect whenever Confidence is placed in Man, and that Man changes it into Authority, it proves his want of real Underſtanding, and ſhews that we may be Dupes to the ignorant, the vain, and the oppreſſive, and all for what, probably from diſtant Expectations, or ſome Pecuniary Motive — What gives your Titled Men Authority over thoſe Men who ſhould be as reſpectable as *they* are, only becauſe Mankind in general are fond of Vanity, pleaſed with the Smiles of a Lord who in all likelihood has no other Qualification to recommend him than that *Title* which the Virtues of his Forefathers handed down to him, and which his own Merits would never have reached; — Away from all this, a-part by all Means from Servility. Let us preſerve our own Independence and our Neighbours will never attempt to invade it, — No, they will aſk our Aſſiſtance inſtead of commanding it — To ſhew you Sir how Confidence might be turned into Authority, and that Authority tinctured with Contempt, I will ſtate one Circumſtance to prove this Fact; Some time in Auguſt laſt, Mr. Wing ſent a Plan (as he called it) to Mr Maxwell for his Approbation, for the Purpoſe of raiſing the Sum of 25,000l. by a Shilling an Acre Tax, without the Knowledge of any

independent

independent Proprietor (as I believe)——It ſo perchanced that Mr. Maxwell not only diſapproved the Plan ſent, as tending to burthen the Proprietors for no Purpoſe but *one*, but alſo equally diſapproved the Intention of ſuch ſecret ſending, for it certainly bore this Appearance, that had Mr. Maxwell approved the Plan, you, the other Proprietors, and myſelf ſhould have been ſet at nought, treated only as ſo many living Animals created for the end of making a certain Number in this World, held as living Objects having common Organs, but without Faculties and unworthy Notice—And who thus contemptuouſly intended to treat us? Why Mr Wing! What the Duke of Bedford's Steward? YES! — Would it not Sir have been infinitely more candid, manly, and open in Mr. Wing if He abſolutely found it neceſſary that a Shilling an Acre ſhould be raiſed, to have formed a Plan for that Purpoſe *without* the help and Aſſiſtance of Mr. Maxwell, and have called a Meeting for the Proprietors to have heard his Reaſons, and he their's? No, why was he *not* Maſter enough of the Subject, or did he think ſuch a Step too humiliating, his Authority would be leſſened, the *independent* Proprietors would have the proper Conſequence they are intitled to, they would have felt their own Weight, which of courſe would (as He feared) leſſen his —There is one ſtrong Proof in this Buſineſs Mr Wing has given to his Neighbours of his Diſcernment, which cannot be denied and for which I give him Credit, that is, making Choice of Mr. Maxwell to aſſiſt and correct his Plan, for evident it is that Mr. Wing knew Mr. Maxwell to be perfectly competent to judge how far ſuch a Plan was compleat and beneficial; incompleate or oppreſſive; And Mr. Maxwell, has fully convinced the Proprietors at large, that no Man was more equal to the Taſk, or more worthy to be conſulted than himſelf, by rejecting that Plan which was a heterogeneous Compoſition of unmeaning Words and Figures made up of Deductions and Subſtractions, the common Waſte of Paper.

In what Light Sir are we to view a Man who is placed for the Protection of a Country, who ſeems ſo unequal to form Plans for the Benefit of it, that would ſmuggle a defective one into the Houſe of Commons, ſhape it into an Act of Parliament under the Sanction of the Name of his great Employer, and Mr. Maxwell (had he ſo conſented) contrary as Mr. Maxwell has clearly proved to the

Neceſſity

Neceſſity of the Times, or to the Wiſhes of the *independent* Proprietors, and moſt probably without their Knowledge, for had Mr. Maxwell given the Plan his Approbation, no other Perſon would have been thought worth the great Projector's Obſervation; It is ſaid Mr. Wing might plead Cuſtom, for this ſecret Conduct, let that be ſo, I ſhall beg Leave to obſerve that ſuch Cuſtom is "more honoured in the Breach than the Obſervance" for it ſurely is equitable to conceive that the Proprietors who are to bear the Burthen have a Right to be conſulted, unleſs Mr. Wing, conſiders himſelf in the nature of a Member of Parliament, deputed by the Proprietors to enrich or ruin them at his Pleaſure; or does he mean to ſay, that as ſoon as *Mr. Maxwell had ſettled* the Plan, he would then have laid it before the Proprietors; it is very extraordinary that Mr. Wing who had this relied Faith in Mr. Maxwell's Abilities, and who had manifeſted them by the Works of his own Hands,* ſhould ſince the Rejection of the Plan, have taken ſo much Pains, and have written ſo many Sheets to prove that Mr. Maxwell had no Abilities at all, how does this Contradiction in the ſame Man, and in ſo ſhort Time comport with ſound Judgement; Diſappointment might anſwer the Queſtion, but ſound Judgment muſt hide her Head.

I am now my good Friend to obſerve to you that it is wonderful ſtrange that this Plan intended for the Benefit of the *WHOLE*, thus found Fault with by the one, and praiſed by the *FRIENDS* of the other, has never made its Appearance for public Judgement, it may be in Conſequence of Mr. Wing's Baſhfulneſs; but it does nor follow becauſe Mr. Wing is ſuppoſed to be a bad Financier, that he ſhould ſuppreſs the *beſt digeſted Plan of his Life* to gratify the NO of Mr. Maxwell, or carry his Politeneſs ſo far as to ſay my Works ſhall not contradict him tho' even if it were at the Expence of the Public Good— I know you will ſay, hear all Parties, ſo ſay I, but if Mr. Wing will not ſpeak, that's no Fault of mine, let him produce his *Plan* as delivered to Mr. Maxwell — to alter it would be wrong, to alter *all Perfection* would make it imperfect, let it ſpeak for itſelf, and if we cannot comprehend it, Mr. Wing is not obliged to find us both Plan and Underſtanding.

Mr.

* He had wrote ſeveral Letters to Mr. Maxwell, for his Opinion,

Mr. Maxwell ſeems hurt at Mr. Wing's Mode of anonymous Writing; I am aſtoniſhed Mr. Maxwell ſhould not be better acquainted with *great* Men and their Methods; if Mr. Maxwell would conſider for a Moment that half the Publications reſpecting the national Government are anonymous and paid for out of the Exchequer; the only Difference then would be that Mr. Wing, is anonymous enough himſelf, too cautious and induſtrious to employ an Agent, too many being already in his Service, which probably might make the Shilling an Acre Tax the more neceſſary.

Mr. Maxwell has thought proper to diſſect Mr. Wing, from Wing to Leg, here I am alſo aſtoniſhed at Mr. Maxwell, for he may reſt aſſured on further Diſſection he will find that it is not the Wing or Leg that hurts the Proprietors, it is between both Parts the Miſchief lays.

Do account to me my good Friend (for in former Times you poſſeſſed the Magic Wand) the Motives, that have induced Mr. Wing to divide ſo materially from the Subject Mr. Maxwell has given him to digeſt; if you recollect, Mr. Maxwell's Publication went to ſhew the *Non* Neceſſity of the Shilling an Acre Tax.

Mr. Wing has thought proper (I mean if he is the anonymous Writer) to offer Words and Figures to the Proprietors, without once ſhewing any Reaſon of his own, in Oppoſition to Mr. Maxwell's Reaſons reſpecting the Shilling an Acre. ——— He writes about the Expences attendant upon the North Bank of Moreton's Leame, *Carr Dyke, and the Folly Banks;* they are really Words to create Sound, the only one ſubject to Expence, is the North Bank —— Let me aſk you, if Carr Dyke has coſt the North Level one Shilling theſe 20 Years, except the common Roading, and which I believe has not been done, or likely to coſt them a Shilling — for what uſe is the Carr Dyke of in caſe of a Drowning? — None — As to the *Folly Bank*, the Herbage will over pay all Expences attending the Repairs of that Bank, to prove which, refer to the Accounts and ſee if the annual Rent of the Folly Bank or how much thereof has, how, and at what Time been expended thereon.

It certainly ſhould be underſtood in what Way the Leaſe of the North Bank ſo much, and ſo properly complained of, was obtained, which in its preſent State ſerves only to put a Sum of Money into the Duke of Bedford's Pocket, taken away from the general Benefit of the North Bank; I ſuppoſe you will ſay it was fairly let at a general Meeting, ſo be it, but before whom? Before a Set of Gentlemen who lived too diſtant therefrom to know its Value, or poſſibly it might ſo happen that a neighbouring Gentleman might attend ſuch Meeting, who was acquainted with the real Value, but for potent Reaſons beſt known to that Gentleman who did attend, He judged it expedient not to intermeddle with the Bidding.

In the former Part of my Letter I charged you with Inactivity—You, Sir who poſſeſs Spirit and Property, as perfectly independent of the Duke of Bedford, (and therefore we ſpeak not of Mr. Wing) as Honeſty would wiſh for, you who know the real Value of the Bank, you who has Property adjoining, you who has experienced a former Impoſition, ſhould have attended the Meeting, ſhould there have came forward with a Valuation, and like your independent Self, ſaid, will you give *ſo much* which is the real Value, if not, I will—But my good Friend, Ely is 30 Miles from Orton; Alas, what is 30 Miles, I can hear you ſay had you been aware your Country demanded your Service, when you could have relieved it from Impoſition and ſaved the North Level a certain Sum of Money from creeping into the Pocket of a Nobleman who wants it NOT. How far Mr. Wing might be juſtified in taking the Leaſe for ſo long a Term, ſo much under Value, for the Benefit of that Nobleman that would certainly rather contribute to the Welfare of the North Level, than be the *nominal* Man to diſtreſs it, is, for Mr. Wing's Conſideration; I have not the ſmalleſt Doubt but when Mr. Wing reconſiders his Conduct in this immediate Inſtance, he will wiſh it had not ſo happened — if ſo, let him requeſt the Duke to give the Leaſe up, and the fair letting thereof, be appropriated to the general Good, the Duke will even then receive a conſiderable Benefit, *poſſibly more than was ever intended him.*

It remains now to be conſidered how far we can relieve ourſelves from the Number of Collectors and other Servants who receive

annual Salaries, for tho' theſe Gentlemen are fairly appointed and have as fairly executed their Truſts; are their ſeveral Appointments for the Time the ſeveral Taxes exiſt? Or can we the Commiſſionrs remove them at Pleaſure? As the laſt I take to be the Fact it will be prudent for the Commiſſioners to meet to conſult how expedient ſuch a Step would be, preceding that Meeting at which the Continuation or Removal might take Place, but what is to be ſaid, The Jews were the choſen People of the LORD, and the Collectors are the choſen People of MAN, It may be ſo, and therefore the Example is too religious I conceive to be found Fault with.

It has been ſaid by Mr. Wing, that ſuch Savings are too trivial— I admit the Savings would not be large, but this Conduct of the independent Commiſſioners would convince the Director General of the North Level, that they have a Power equal to his, and are now rouſed from that lethargic Diſpoſition, which has lulled them into a State of Inactivity for many Years, not only to *do* the thing that is right, but to take eſpecial Care that no other Perſon *ſhall* do the Thing that is *wrong*, even if ſupported by the whole commiſſioned *Tenantry* of his Grace of Bedford, unleſs they ſhould be compelled againſt their known Honeſty, to uſe one Monoſyllable inſtead of the other, YES when they wiſh to ſay NO,

The foregoing Sheets were put together before Mr. Wing's confeſſed Publication of the 17th of September, made its Appearance, which happened on the 27th of the ſame Month— It has now appeared, read by many, and underſtood by few; What is the Compoſition? Why a Kind of hiſtorical Account of the Bedford Level, taken from Cole's Laws, together with Recitals of Acts of Parliament for laying Taxes, which every Proprietor was perfectly acquainted with; with ſome few Reports made at a Meeting at Thorney ſo early as Auguſt, 1778, and which were approved by the Committee then preſent; Why Sir ſhould Mr. Wing ſtop ſo ſhort? If he thought it proper to publiſh the Reſolutions of the Committee, as finding them proper, ſtrong, and Independent, why not publiſh their Names? No, it would probably have appeared that ſuch Commiſſioners were all, or the major Part of them the Duke of Bedford's Tenants, and I will leave my Neighbours to judge how far ſuch Committee are inclinable

inclinable to run counter from their *Dictator*, without having any Intereſt that is taxable of *their own*, and, whoſe Memory, they properly judged might ſerve to "viſit the Sins of the Fathers "upon their Children" but they judged wiſely, and knew they had an Intereſt much better than Half the Taxable Eſtates in the Level, that of pleaſing their Steward.

What have we now to do with Recitals of Acts of Parliament, ſome of which are dead, and others expiring; but this expiring Act of the Shilling an Acre, it ſeems muſt *not die*, and therefore Mr. Wing has very prudently called in the Aid of that moſt able Phyſician Mr. Maxwell, whoſe Preſcriptions are healthful, but too nauſeous for a weak Stomach to digeſt: Pray Mr. Maxwell make it palatable, take back your unfriendly NO, and look upon me, as a Father ſhould upon his CHILD, ſmile, and, ſay YES.

Mr. Wing obſerves in Page 14 — "That every Proprietor "has a Right to conſider as he thinks proper, without being "ſuppoſed to intend any perſonal Inſult to him" Granted; — I therefore thank Mr. Maxwell, moſt heartily to whoſe Wiſdom be all Reſpect, for having the Intereſt of the Proprietors ſo much at Heart, as to ſay, I will do the Thing that is RIGHT, in Oppoſition to that great Luminary whoſe Powers can dry the Face of Earth who will not ſuffer a common Herb to lift its Head, but will keep in Subjection the Graſs of the Field, and thereby puniſh both Man and Beaſt — Hail to thy FEN Omnipotence.

In the ſame Page Mr, Wing charges Mr. Maxwell with a great Crime, with "Endeavours to allure his Grace of Bedford "by what appears to him the moſt powerful of all Arguments, "SELF - INTEREST" — This is nothing to the Point; as to the Propriety of the Tax, it only proves that Mr. Maxwell, has mixed with Men of Information and Conſequence, and is therefore a good Judge of both, and recollects that the Duke has ſuſtained a very uniform Character both before, and ſince he came of Age, Mr. Wing will not find the Duke a *Spendthrift*.

In Page 17, Mr. Wing would inſinuate, that Mr. Maxwell would wiſh to raiſe a Jealouſy between both Banks, and calls God to forbid, that ſuch a Thing ſhould happen which was never intended; No Sir, Mr. Maxwell's Intentions were to ſhew that the South Bank was HONESTLY *Let for* 73l. 8s. *per Annum*, when the North Bank, which is much better Herbage and longer, is Let to *a Somebody* for 17l. 17s. per Annum, but Mr. Wing was always known to be fond of a *GOOD THING*.

I cannot ſee the Driſt of Mr. Wing's Publication; pray read it yourſelf, and tell me, if the intended Tax is any Way diſpoſed off, it ſurely is not; Mr. Wing neither diſproves Mr. Maxwell's Calculation, or offers one himſelf, but does much more, He ſays He will *tell the Duke* all that has paſſed, and that He himſelf is an *Honorable Member* of the Bedford Level Corporation; What a charming Thing would this Honourable Gentleman's Portrait be, done by Clifton, and hung over the Fire-place at the Dog and Doublet, that we the Commiſſioners may fall down and "worſhip the GOLDEN IMAGE"—ſic Tranſit Gloria Mundi.

I have reſerved a Stamford Paper for your Peruſal, which contains a Letter from Mr. Payne in Anſwer to a Charge reſpecting his Fondneſs for BRANDY, there is ſomething ſo genuine in the Production, that you will like it well, and will with me wiſh his Brandy in Future as genuine as his Production. He ſays, He was 14 Days and Nights in wet Cloaths upon the North Bank, watching the Water; it was lucky for the Country, he did not ſleep; and for Himſelf that he did not catch the Chincough, for he certainly was the moſt induſtrious Man in the Level. What think you now of JONAS IN THE WHALE's BELLY?

I have this Moment read the ſecond Part of Mr. Maxwell's Pamphlet, I muſt confeſs I had my Fears leſt the honeſt Warmth of his Temper ſhould lead him aſtray from his original good Intentions; the Argument was always his, for indeed he had NO Opponent; but He has proved that a wiſe Man leſt a Moment to his quiet Conſideration, will ſee his Haſte of Words, acknowledge them, and raiſe as it were to the Height of all Information, ſo plain, that even I, can comprehend; it is indeed a Maſter-piece of Intelligence and *Conviction*, it is what your Candour will thank him

for, and what I ſhall in Raptures praiſe. There is only one Thing can corrupt him, for whoſe Protection my Orilons, ſhall long hold their Devotion, that is, that he may never be laugh'd at, for having what is called "the Honor to be a Member of "the Bedford Level Corporation" by Way of winding up a Sentence or for the Sake of WORDS and OSTENTATION.

You Sir who really have the Benefit and Reſpect of all Men at Heart, will ſay, why ſhould Mr. Wing be reduced to the moſt of all unpleaſant Alternatives, that of Quotations from Plays; to be ſure if any ſhould be quoted, Shakeſpeare's ſtand as the Rock of Obſervance: But what is the Quotation to prove? ſimply this, that Mr. Wing has no Argument at all, it may be for his WANT OF KNOWLEDGE, and conſequently will have Recourſe to Novelty by Way of taking off the Obſervance, but here he is miſtaken, for Mr. Maxwell is at MATURITY when Mr. Wing is only of AGE—Brutus does ſpeak to be ſure as if he was in very rougiſh Company, and bombaſtically threatens all around him, and tells them they "ſhall be ſorry "for WHAT THEY HAVE DONE"— What? does this Son of of Terror mean to ſay like the Gods of old, we will hurl our Thunder on their devoted Heads, for the ſcurvy Rogues SHOULD not think for themſelves. He talks in the ſame Sentence, of being armed with "Honeſty"—Does he mean to arrogate to himſelf the whole Province of that Name? Or, does he uſe it as being novel to his HONOR, his COUNTRY, and the COLLECTORS? — He had better put it out to Nurſe, for the Benefit of the Level, if well nurtured it will prevent all future Contradiction.

The only Man of Profit in this Paper Conteſt is the Printer who has juſt given me two new Publications, the one ſigned Touchſtone, the other Letters of Correſpondence between Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Wing; Permit me unlike you FOX-HUNTERS, "to *try back*" to the Publication ſigned "A North Level Proprietor" which is now the confeſſed Work of Mr. Wing; in Page the 4th, the Writer ſays after ſpeaking of the "Plan, for raiſing Money to "maintain and preſerve the Works belonging to the North Level, "and for the diſcharging the Debts contracted thereon" An anonymous or leſs reſpectable Writer "than Mr. Maxwell, might "be SUSPECTED of having INVENTED it himſelf for the "Purpoſe of ſhewing his Ingenuity in objecting to it, for ſuch an one

"hath

"hath certainly *never appeared before the Public*" meaning the Plan. This is the moſt unprovoked diſhonorable Attack upon Mr. Maxwell I ever read, to ſay, he Mr. Wing ſuſpected Mr. Maxwell of inventing a *Plan* for the Purpoſe of ſhewing his Ingenuity in objecting to it, when Mr. Wing himſelf was the *abſolute Father* of this identical Plan, thus complained of as appears by his Letter Page 8 line 22, is moſt abominable, and diſhoneſt—What Confidence is to be placed in ſuch a Man? What Reliance is to be fix'd upon that Man who under an anonymous Character, will charge Mr. Maxwell with doing a wicked Act, when Mr, Wing himſelf is the *doer*, is the *abſolute and real Author*. Have you Invention enough my good Sir, to account for this evil Conduct? I think you not hardened ſufficiently in the Thorney and ſtinging Ways of wicked Invention, to offer any Anſwer to a Circumſtance ſo much out of the Line of Truth and Honor.

At the latter end of theſe correſponding Letters, this mighty Man of *ſtrict Faith* ſays "he believes another Year the Tax "will be proceeded upon, notwithſtanding ANY Oppoſition that "can be made to it." You have no Occaſion to doubt the Gentleman's Veracity, after the Circumſtance I have juſt ſtated; —It is poſſible this mighty Son of Project might be miſtaken; if He is not, I ſhall think his Criticiſm upon the Word *FOLLY*, in his confeſt Publication Page 18 line 9, perfectly right, and the Parties not undeſerving the Word.

You muſt confeſs there is a Degree of Fairneſs in Mr. Wing, in giving us poor Slaves a Year's Notice of his monarchical Intentions, that We may "be certified how long we have to live" it will therefore be proper we ſhould keep ourſelves pure to meet that awful Hour, I have known terrible Storms blow over without doing any Injury, tho' they carried Deſtruction in their dark and ſwarthy Countenance.

The over-ruling Power* can do Wonders,—can make the *feeble* ſtrong, and by ſuch Acts of Providence, Mr. Wing may carry his Threats into Execution; — His own Calculations would never reach the firſt Turnpike

When

* The Duke

When this Gentleman first mounted his Throne, he was desired to attend to the Advice of his Friends, but he would not "bow down his Ear and hear them" tho' he confessed one of them a most respectable Character, * taught him a very wholesome Lesson, and to whom, Honor and Gratitude should have bound him, — But, when we leave School, we soon forget *our Latin*.

I am

Dear Sir,

Your's

very truly,

Vineyard, Peterborough,
October 22d, 1788.

" GEO. EDMUDNS.

* Mr. Patrick.

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